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[The Huffington Post](#)

The VA Inspector General and members of the House Veterans Oversight Subcommittee are questioning \$24 million awarded in bonuses by the VA to technology office employees over the course of only two years. Some individual bonuses were more than \$70,000. During just the last fiscal year, VA executives received more than \$4.3 million in bonuses.

At a subcommittee hearing Wednesday morning, Subcommittee Chair Rep. Harry Mitchell (D-AZ) said, "We all know that the Department of Veterans Affairs has some of the hardest working and dedicated employees. However, there are concerns about the VA bonus process and how the VA matches pay to individual and organizational performance."

This scrutiny comes after two Inspector General (IG) reports cited "abuses" and "questionable circumstances" such as nepotism, abuse of authority, improper hiring, and inappropriate employee relationships in investigations of VA bonuses. [WSLS Channel 10](#) in Virginia also uncovered issues with the way performance bonuses are awarded after obtaining VA salary data through the Freedom of Information Act (FOI).

Lawmakers at the hearing specifically urged the VA to tie bonuses to performance tied directly to providing better services to veterans. Mitchell says the Subcommittee is very concerned about the recent report findings and wants to "ensure that these reports don't point to a potentially bigger problem within the [VA]."

Deputy VA Secretary Scott Gould told the Subcommittee that recently revised rules reduces the cap on bonuses to \$30,000, but Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) pointed out that he represents a district where the unemployment rate is as high as 17 percent in some areas. He says the VA should

keep economic conditions in mind when setting bonuses, because "that is more money than a lot of people see in a year."

According to [WSLS](#) , Steve Bast, who recently retired from the Roanoke VA Regional Office, says VA employees who process claims receive performance awards when they significantly exceed claim-processing performance requirements, which, he says, means reaching decisions on claims whether those decisions are approvals, denials, or requests for more evidence.

Critics charge that a quantitative-only measure of performance for those who process claims leads to faulty processing, long delays for VA services, and a higher number of appeals, which in the long run could cost the VA more. These critics want to see qualitative measures added to the performance bonus system to ensure that claims are not just processed quickly but also correctly.

Rep. Tom Perriello (D-VA) says, "The members of congress who were [at the hearing] felt strongly that bonuses should be secondary to getting the backlog of claims processed ... Even in the cases where performance bonuses were warranted, the veterans should be taken care of first."

Adam Bozzi, a spokesperson for Mitchell's office said on Thursday, "Veterans should have confidence that VA funding is going to provide the best services and that bonuses will not be tied to inappropriate measures."

The IG reports are available [here](#) and [here](#) .